

The impact of leader motives in students: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Leader motives elucidate the driving forces behind leadership behavior and decision-making, which are pivotal for understanding effective leadership dynamics across diverse contexts. In this context, the systematic literature review (SLR) analyzed leader motives among students, providing insights into the underlying drivers shaping leadership behaviors within educational environments. This paper aims to understand how leader motives impact student behavior, academic performance, and social dynamics within educational environments. Based on McClelland's needs theory as a conceptual framework, the review examines students' prevalence and manifestations of achievement, power, and affiliation motives. This study systematically reviewed 16 papers, scholarly databases, and pertinent literature published between 2007 and 2024. A preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) method was used to report the items. The findings underscore the importance of nurturing leader motives in educational settings, which contribute to positive student outcomes and foster leadership development through the lens of need theory. This study contributes to understanding how leader motives can elevate leadership behaviors and outcomes, offering valuable insights for policymakers and academic leaders aiming to enhance educational quality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon which can be analyzed from various perspectives [1]. Over the past five decades, researchers have identified several motives that influence leaders' behaviors [2], [3]. Motivation theorists suggest that motives are conscious states that energize individuals to strive toward restoring balance or equilibrium [4], [5]. The notion of motives as energizers suggests that they activate habits or behavior patterns consistent with achieving a specific goal or objective [6], [7]. Hence, the strength of an individual's motivation is determined by the extent to which their motives activate their habitual behavior [8]. The study of leader motives and their implications concerning leader behavior and outcomes is an essential area of research in the field of education, particularly in the lives of students. The underlying motives drive the students to take on leadership roles, make decisions, and influence their peers and communities [9], [10]. Motivational factors and behavioral tendencies captured in the leader motive profile can significantly influence and shape leadership performance, particularly in areas that demand interpersonal skills, strategic decision-making, and the management of complex institutional dynamics [11], [12].

Various empirical studies [13]–[15] have indicated that leader motives directly influence student behavior. A few of the longitudinal studies [16], [17] focus on leader motives' long-term effects on students' career aspirations, while a few of the existing literature [18], [19] highlight the importance of leadership

styles and strategies. However, there remains a need for systematic examinations and integration of leader motives, specifically among students within educational settings. There is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the motives that drive students to take on leadership roles [3]. While individual studies may examine student leadership and motivation aspects, there is a gap in synthesizing and comprehensively analyzing the existing literature on leader motives among students. There is limited clarity on how specific motives such as achievement, power, and affiliation affect student behaviors, academic performance, and overall development. By delving into the nuanced dynamics of these motives, researchers and educators can better tailor interventions and strategies to support students in maximizing their leadership potential and positively impacting their school communities [20], [21].

McClelland's need theory offers a perspective through which one can examine how leader motives foster positive educational environments [22], [23]. The study discusses the practical strategies for identifying and nurturing students' achievement, affiliation, and power motives, as well as potential implications for promoting effective leadership behaviors and outcomes among student leaders [24]–[26]. Research has shown that these three motives can significantly influence an individual's behavior and performance in various settings, including the educational environment [22]–[26]. Understanding these motives can help individuals and institutions to develop strategies that align with their goals and objectives and to motivate individuals to perform at their best [25]. Overall, the leader motive profile can predict their effectiveness in situations where leaders must make decisions and motivate others to accept and implement those decisions [27], [28].

Despite previous studies conducted on the significance of leadership in academic scenarios, there remains a dearth of knowledge regarding leader motives in the educational environment. This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to fill this gap by synthesizing existing research to explore the prevalence and implications of leader motives among students. By examining empirical studies and scholarly literature, this review seeks to elucidate the role of leader motives in shaping student behavior, academic performance, and social dynamics. Thus, the specific research questions we have identified are:

- i) What are the predominant leader motives observed in students according to McClelland's needs theory, as evidenced in included studies and databases?
- ii) What are the effective strategies for integrating leader motives in students' lives, as conceptualized by McClelland's need theory?

The unique aspect of this study lies in the identification of how different leader motives, such as achievement, power, and affiliation, shape student behavior, academic performance, and psychological development of the students. This research delves into how leader motives beyond their leadership style influence the classroom climate and personal growth of the students. Integrating leader motives in students' lives shapes students' development beyond academic success; thus, they learn to align their personal motivations with collaborative and leadership responsibilities.

2. METHOD

The methodology used was a SLR. Systematic reviews not only contribute to the advancement of knowledge on a particular topic but also facilitate the construction of a theoretical foundation for research [29]. The selection of the documents to be included in the review, the data extraction methodology, and the analysis were adapted to answer the research questions.

2.1. Research design

The research began by identifying articles on the scholarly database relevant to leader motives. The study executed a four-stage literature review process to strengthen its findings. These stages encompassed identification, screening, feasibility assessment, and final inclusion for a systematic and comprehensive approach to evaluating and incorporating relevant literature for their investigation [30], [31]. The researchers pull through these steps to obtain relevant results.

2.2. Identification

The search strategy included three sets of search items such as 'leader motives', 'McClelland's theory of needs', and 'leader motives in students.' Boolean connectors were used in order to narrow down and delimit the object of study as precisely as possible. A comprehensive search on scholarly databases such as ProQuest, PubMed, Google Scholar, JSTORE, ERIC, and EBSCO were reviewed.

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion

In the inclusion and exclusion stage, criteria were ensured for the selection of relevant articles to align with the scope and objectives of the research [32], [33]. First, the articles that were searched were only from reputed scholarly databases. Second, to contribute to a comprehensive and efficient search process, the search for articles in the scholarly databases was aided by multiple tools, including Publish or Perish 7,

Mendeley, VOS Viewer, and NVivo 12 Plus applications. Third, the search was limited to journal articles published from 2007 to 2024. Fourth, the articles were searched based on their suitability with the theme and research topic to align with the study's focus. Fifth, reports were limited to scholarly sources and English. An initial search identified many related literatures from the databases mentioned above. The articles which were not related to leader motives based on need theory were excluded.

2.4. Screening and eligibility

The selected papers were screened using predefined eligibility criteria. The screening process of (n=543) papers involved the examination of titles, abstracts, and keywords. The duplicate themes were eliminated, resulting in the selection of (n=16) articles for the SLR. The selected articles were derived from the screening and eligibility assessment stages for subsequent data analysis. Each article's themes were thoroughly examined, spanning from the title to the conclusion. After this comprehensive review, the findings were entered into various applications for in-depth analysis [34].

2.5. PRISMA

The selected articles were obtained from screening and eligibility methods. The number of searches was reduced from (n=1,096) to (n=16) after thoroughly examining full papers and eliminating duplicates. Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) publication standards were used. The details are inferred from the search process and illustrated through the PRISMA diagram in Figure 1.

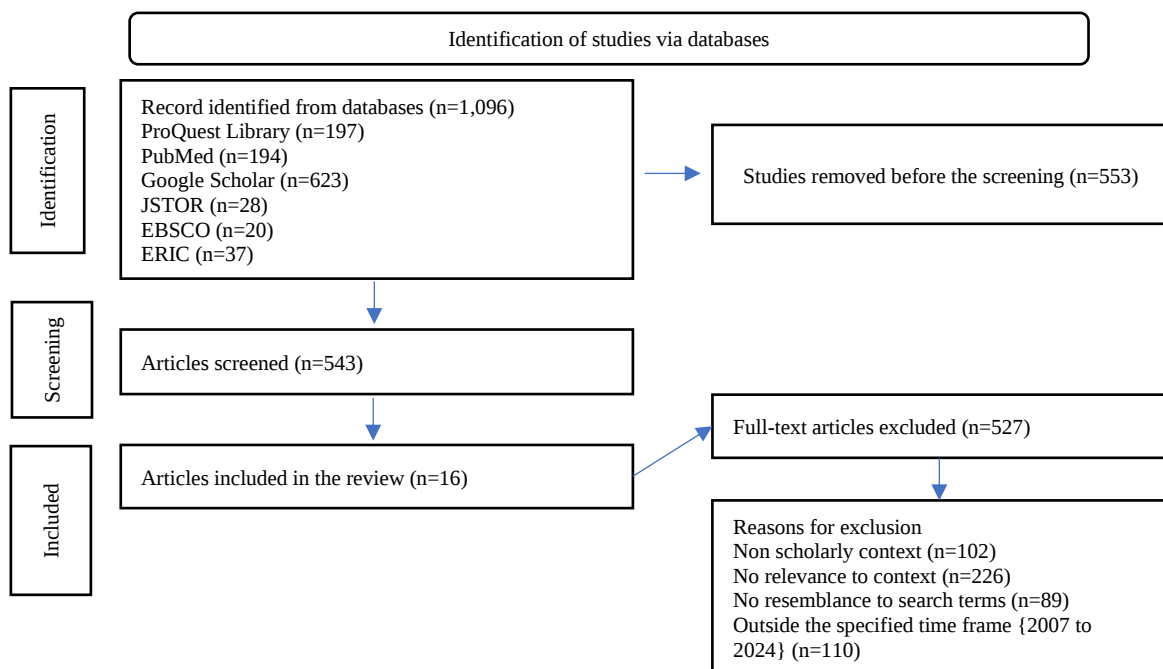


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart of search and screening process [35], [36]

3. RESULTS

The result of an in-depth analysis of the articles is arranged to summarize the included studies, which dealt with the relevant questions related to leader motives in students' lives. From the total number of documents initially retrieved from the search process (n=1,096), after applying established inclusion criteria, (n=16) articles met the established inclusion criteria and were deemed relevant to the compatible theme. A total of (n=1,080) articles were excluded from the literature review based on the established criteria, as illustrated in Figure 1. After identifying the articles, duplicate texts (n=553) were removed on a screening criterion. Further exclusions were made based on the review of titles and abstracts, eliminating (n=527) documents. After all eliminations and exclusions, (n=16) articles were finally selected for inclusion in the literature review.

3.1. Exploration of leader motives from the content analysis

In terms of publication trend based on the database, the majority of the papers selected in this SLR were from Google Scholar (5 publications; 31.25%), ProQuest Library (3 publications; 18.75%), JSTORE

(3 publications; 18.75%), PubMed (2 publications; 12.5%) ERIC (2 publications; 12.5%), and EBSCO (1 publication; 6.25%). It is noted that despite an extensive period spanning from 2007 to 2024, the search revealed a limited number of articles specifically on the theme of leader motives, particularly within the context of the school setting and based on need theory. The selected (n=16) articles were analyzed using the Publish or Perish 7, Mendeley, VOS Viewer, and NVivo 12 Plus applications for further qualitative or thematic analysis. The summary of the included studies based on RQ1 highlighted the pattern of leader motives among students of various age groups. The findings are represented in Table 1

Table 1. Summary of the included studies

No	Study population/sample size	Country	Pattern of leader motives	Study findings	Reference
1	Engineering student project teams -students (N=1,088); working adults, (N=466) in Canada.	Canada	Power motive	Identified ultra-dominance profiles, prestigious leadership profiles, and weak social power motive profiles play a crucial role in shaping overall team dynamics and influencing personality traits.	[37]
2	Students (N=89) who participated in the leadership living learning community (L3C) at Texas A & M University.	USA	Achievement and affiliation motives	The need for achievement and the need for affiliation were the most common motives for joining the voluntary, residential leadership learning community.	[38]
3	Students (N=322) [175 female, 147 male] in undergraduate psychology classes at a Midsized University	USA	Affiliation motive	The study results indicated that individuals with a dismissing attachment style scored lower on several dimensions of affiliation motivation than individuals characterized by secure, fearful, or preoccupied attachment styles.	[39]
4	College students (N=266) in China and (N=255) College students in the USA	China	Achievement, power and affiliation motives	Chinese college students showed significantly higher levels of achievement motive than American college students, but American college students showed significantly higher levels of affiliation motive.	[40]
5	Bachelor students (N=196) from a Dutch Technical University.	Netherland	Achievement, power and affiliation motives	Basic human motives of achievement, affiliation, and power are related to goal-striving motivation and performance outcomes in an academic setting.	[41]
6	Adult students (N=364) at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), USA	USA	Achievement and affiliation motives	The study identifies drives and motives among all adult students, along with notable distinctions between Hispanic and non-Hispanic adult students.	[42]
7	Business management students (N= 311) in a state university in Cavite, Philippines	Philippines	Achievement, power and affiliation motives	With the findings, the teachers could determine the interventions to enhance the motivational factors that may be weak among the students and further enhance those that are dominant.	[43]
8	Secondary school students (N=138), 107 females and 31 males.	Czech Republic	Achievement motive	The hypothesized relation between social position in class and achievement motivation was only partly supported.	[44]
9	Chinese undergraduates (N=302) who enrolled in an entrepreneurship course	China	Affiliation motive	Positive relationships between a challenging learning environment and study engagement and teacher-student relationships are significant in increasing entrepreneurial self-efficacy among students.	[45]
10	Psychology undergraduate students (N=150) (86% females).	Germany	Achievement motive	Explicit achievement motivation measures can be combined to one latent variable, regardless of the different underlying concepts	[46]
11	Students (N=149) of Nanyang Technological University.	Singapore	Power motive	nPow was positively associated with both entrepreneurial and leadership career choice.	[47]
12	Participants (N=400) students.	USA	Power motive	The testing of the validity of social motives was undertaken. The scale demonstrated a very strong relationship between the power motive scale predicting the influential behavior of the students.	[48]
13	Students (N=336) from four public and four private schools of the Sargodha district, Pakistan.	Pakistan	Achievement motive	Achievement motivation and self-concept are significantly related to academic achievement.	[49]
14	Literature study-1:(N=139 papers); study-2: (N=113); study-3, (N=116) by students from German University.	Germany	Achievement and affiliation motives.	Employing transformational leadership behaviors (TLBs) that align with the motives of their followers is recommended as a strategy for enhancing the effectiveness of the followers.	[50]
15	Students (N=15) [9 female] from the University of Osnabruck, aged 20-29	Germany	Achievement motive	In the study, participants rated achievement pictures as relating more strongly to achievement contents than control pictures.	[51]
16	German high-school students (N=1,084) [grades 9 and 10, mean age: 15 years].	Germany	Achievement motive	Differential relationships between school subject-specific achievement motives and achievement (grades) revealed evidence regarding convergent and discriminant validity.	[52]

Across different educational settings, including universities in the USA, Germany, Singapore, and the Netherlands, achievement and affiliation motives emerge as significant factors influencing students' behaviors and choices. The literature review highlights the diversity in motivational profiles across different countries, including Canada, the USA, China, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the Czech Republic, Germany, Singapore, and Pakistan. The combination of leader motives consisting of achievement, power, and affiliation is represented by three studies (18.75%). Achievement motive has the highest number of publications, totaling five studies (31.25%). Achievement and affiliation motives are found in three publications (18.75%). Power motives are also represented in three publications (18.75%). Affiliation motives are explored in two publications (12.5%). No studies explicitly explore the combination of achievement and power motives, as well as the combination of affiliation and power motives, based on the included literature review. This underscores potential gaps in research that may warrant further investigation. All 16 papers employ a quantitative approach regarding the methodology in the review.

3.2. The integration of need theory with leader motives in students

Hattie *et al.* [4] observed that need represents an internal energy force that directs behavior towards actions, meaning our actions represent needs. Integrating McClelland's need theory of motivation into an educational setting can enhance student engagement and performance. This creative integration fosters a deeper understanding of individual motivations and drives, thereby facilitating tailored approaches to learning and achievement (RQ 2).

3.2.1. The achievement need as a leader motive among students

The discovery of five publications in the included study focus on achievement motives [44], [46], [49], [51], [52] suggests a significant emphasis on understanding the role of achievement in students' academic and leadership pursuits. Moore *et al.* [38] reported that the need for a strong desire to accomplish something tough, attain high success, and master complex tasks should be pivotal to students. Achievement motive focuses on a detailed review of these works, which allows us to identify the integration in students' desire for success, mastery, and personal growth, inspiring them to set attainable goals and strive for excellence while embracing personal improvement [53]. Fostering a classroom environment that values individual growth encourages students to take risks and learn from setbacks [40]–[46]. Another exciting aspect of the study is that integrating leader motives encourages students to accomplish realistic but challenging goals. Additionally, it enhances the potential of every student and sets high expectations for their academic performance and personal growth [39], [40].

3.2.2. The power need as a leader motive among students

A notable focus on studying power motives among students is evident from the discovery of three publications on this topic [37], [47], [48]. Integrating the power motive into the educational setting involves empowering students to exercise leadership and make meaningful contributions to the institution as well as to society [27]. Need power instills students to take initiative, solve problems, and influence their learning environment [40], [41]. Moreover, it is crucial to empower students by giving them opportunities to make choices and take on leadership roles in the classroom. Providing students with opportunities to take on leadership roles and responsibilities within the classroom, school, and community further enhances their all-round development [43]. Other researchers pointed out that students' decision-making skills are essential to consider the leader motives. This involvement encourages students to think critically about power dynamics, social justice, and equity issues within the school and broader society. It also helps to engage students in activities that promote civic responsibility, community service, and active citizenship, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility within the larger community [47], [48].

3.2.3. The affiliation need as a leader motive among students

There is a relatively limited focus on studying affiliation motives among students, demonstrated by the discovery of only two publications on this subject [39], [44]. Integrating leader motives in students cultivates an environment that nurtures social connections, fosters a sense of belonging, and encourages positive relationships among peers. It promotes collaboration and teamwork through cooperative learning activities, fostering a supportive and inclusive classroom atmosphere where students feel valued, accepted, and connected to both their peers and teachers [38], [40], [41]. This approach fosters a sense of community and belonging by embracing diversity and promoting empathy, kindness, and mutual respect among students. Moreover, it provides opportunities for students to cultivate positive relationships with peers and mentors within and beyond the classroom environment [39], [40]. The integration establishes a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment where each student feels appreciated and respected. A strong emphasis on

affiliation motives among school children can enhance their social-emotional development, academic achievement, and overall well-being [42], [43], [45].

4. DISCUSSION

Based on two research questions, the researchers conducted this literature review to evaluate the impact of leader motives and their results on the effectiveness of the students' behavioral outcomes. All studies proceeded after the careful formulation of concepts and appropriate research questions. The findings of the study are briefly summarized, and implications for further research are recommended.

Integrating leader motives into students' lives within an educational setting, the role of leader motives is multifaceted [54]. Leader motives encompassing achievement, power, and affiliation needs, have profound significance for the field of educational leadership and the broader community [21]. By integrating leader motives into educational practices, educators can create environments that nurture students' holistic development and prepare them to become responsible and engaged members of society. This integrated approach enhances academic success and equips students with the values and motivation needed to thrive as responsible leaders in an ever-changing world [12]. Students learn to influence others effectively, navigate challenges, and achieve common goals by engaging in leadership roles and activities [55]. They are encouraged to set ambitious yet attainable goals for themselves and work towards realizing their full potential. The focus is not only on academic achievement but also on personal growth and development. By integrating leader motives, students are empowered to make a positive difference in their communities and the world at large [56].

Reviewing several previous studies [40]–[43], the researchers felt that the profile needs of each individual student in executing leadership roles are different [57]. Leader motives are not necessarily tied to positional posts; instead, they can be viewed as the desire and willingness of the students to provide service to others and enrich learning and transformation [58]. Lizzio [59] investigated that students' sense of identification, and not their level of achievement motive, predict their willingness to contribute and engage in leadership in the academic environment. Thus, focusing on the leader motives as “process more than a position” and “relationship more than a role” is crucial to capacity-building leadership [60], [61]. Hence, the researchers opine that leadership development programs should consider integrating the understanding of these motives and encourage empowerment, which ultimately enhances both individual and collective growth.

This study is significant as it is one of the first to integrate need theory into understanding leader motives in students' lives. By incorporating McClelland's need theory of motivation into educational settings, educators can establish environments conducive to holistic growth. This integration of needs can promote responsible leadership and social-emotional competencies among students. This research encourages a holistic approach to leadership, wherein aligning leader motives with educational goals can lead to more balanced and effective leadership strategies that ultimately improve both individual and institutional outcomes. This study provides key recommendations to educationists to facilitate positive leadership motives in students. These findings can shape future leadership training by focusing on fostering positive leader motives in teachers and administrators, which can influence students' motivation and long-term success.

While the review highlights the significance of leader motives as drivers of student outcomes, the balance or imbalance between these motives can lead to different outcomes. Secondly, leader motives may have different implications depending on regional, socio-economic, or institutional contexts. This review primarily focuses on the positive impacts of leader motives, but the researchers felt that there is a need to examine the potential negative consequences of certain leadership behaviors. While the review offers insight into integrating McClelland's need theory into leadership strategies, it leaves room for further exploration of how this integration can be systematically applied in real-world settings. This SLR provides insights into the existing research landscape on leader motives among students, but its findings may not fully capture all relevant studies or reflect global perspectives. The scope of the review and the inclusion criteria may limit the generalizability of the findings. The study also identifies gaps in the literature, such as the limited exploration of the combination of achievement and power motives as well as affiliation and power motives. Further research is needed to address these gaps and deepen our understanding of leader motives in diverse educational contexts. It is recommended that this study be replicated at smaller institutions to assess the three needs in exploring the leader motives.

5. CONCLUSION

Studies across various educational settings worldwide have consistently highlighted the influence of achievement and affiliation motives in students' behaviors, as well as academic performance. It is becoming evident that the integration of McClelland's need theory within these studies provided a theoretical

foundation to examine how different leader motives, particularly achievement and affiliation, foster positive leadership potential. The present review sheds light on the significance of leader motives among students across various educational settings worldwide. From the present literature review, it is clear that achievement and affiliation motives emerge as significant factors influencing students' behaviors, academic accomplishments, and career aspirations. Furthermore, the integration of McClelland's need theory of motivation into educational settings offers promising avenues for holistic student development, responsible leadership, and positive learning outcomes.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (AD) on request.

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